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SOME PROBLEMS IN THE ETHNOLOGY OF THE CROW AND VILLAGE INDIANS

By ROBERT H. LOWIE

IN the course of several summers' work among the Crow and the Village Indians of the upper Missouri, under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History, a number of interesting problems have developed, some of which may prove of general interest.

The first point to which I should like to call attention is the possible influence of the Caddoan tribes in the development of Northwestern Plains culture. Students of the Omaha have recently informed us that the earth-lodges, and probably also the Medicine Pipe ceremony, of that tribe owe their origin to the Arikara.¹ It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that the earth-lodge of the Mandan and Hidatsa may have resulted from contact with the same member of the Caddoan family. As for the Medicine Pipe ceremony, the Crows, who share this performance with their kinsmen to the east, trace its introduction to the Hidatsa, while the latter positively assert that they themselves obtained it from the Arikara. In addition we have Maximilian's statement that the Hot dance of the Ruhptare Mandan and of the Hidatsa had been purchased of the Arikara.² Here, to be sure, we must exercise some caution. The Hot dance described by the Prince comprised two spectacular features—a sort of fire-walk, and the plunging of the performers' arms into hot water. The latter has been described in connection with the Dakota *heyoka* organization;³ while the fire-dance was

¹ Fletcher and LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, *27th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, p. 112.

² Maximilian Prinz zu Wied, *Reise in das innere Nord-America in den Jahren 1832 bis 1834* (Coblenz, 1841), II, p. 144.

³ J. O. Dorsey, *A Study of Siouan Cults*, *11th Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 469.

performed by the Arapaho,¹ Gros Ventres,² Cheyenne,³ and, according to the present writer's informants in the field, by the Santee. Accordingly, it would not be justifiable to conclude that, because the Mandan and Hidatsa obtained *their* Hot dance from the Arikara, the latter must have originated the performance in question.

A consideration of the older literature on the Arikara—especially of Maximilian's and Brackenridge's notes, and of Clark's data in *The Indian Sign Language*—might lead to the question whether the Arikara are to be credited with the development of the age-class system that characterizes Mandan and Hidatsa military societies. However, a series of interviews with one of the best Arikara informants now living has convinced me that that system did not exist among his people, though, singly considered, the military organizations of the Arikara reveal some analogies with the corresponding societies of neighboring tribes. So far, then, as this group of societies is concerned, the influence of the Arikara, if exerted at all, must have been confined to single societies or ceremonial details.

On the other hand, the esoteric societies of the Arikara may have had a deep influence on the secret medicine-bundle ("shrine") fraternities of the Mandan and Hidatsa. Unfortunately, we have very little information on this phase of culture for any of the tribes concerned, so that the foregoing remark must be taken solely as hinting at a possibility. In point of mythology and folklore we are in a somewhat better position, for there is a fair collection of Arikara traditions by G. A. Dorsey, and the much fuller body of Pawnee mythology brought together by this writer would enable us to determine with some accuracy the distinctively Caddoan elements. But we should have to secure much more of the folklore of the two neighboring tribes before pronouncing on the mutual influence of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara, or indeed on that exerted by the Mandan and Hidatsa upon each other.

¹ Kroeber, The Arapaho, *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, XVIII, p. 190.

² *Id.*, Ethnology of the Gros Ventre, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, I, p. 190.

³ Mooney, The Cheyenne, *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, I, p. 415.

The second question I should like to discuss is of wider import. There can be no doubt that the Hidatsa and the Crows have sprung from the same stock. This conclusion is, of course, not based on a separation myth, though common to both tribes, but on linguistic considerations. Though the two languages are not mutually intelligible,¹ their relationship is very close indeed and points to a relatively recent separation. From this it might be supposed that there is also a close cultural relationship, but this assumption is not borne out by the facts. Without harping on the obvious difference in material culture between the nomadic tipi-dwelling Crows and the agricultural Hidatsa living in earth-lodges, we cannot fail to be impressed with the differences in social and religious organization.

In social organization, to be sure, there is one significant trait shared by both tribes: both are divided into exogamous nicknamed clans with maternal descent. Here, however, the similarity ends. The seven Hidatsa clans are assembled in two moieties—the Three-Clans and the Four-Clans. Whether these larger units were also at one time exogamous, I found it impossible to determine to my satisfaction. The number of Crow clans is variously set at from thirteen to twenty-four. By most informants these clans are linked together so as to form six larger units, of which the exogamy is again doubtful. Now, there is not a single clan in the Crow list that corresponds in name to any one of the Hidatsa list. The fact that both tribes employ the nickname system for their clans is of no special significance in this connection, since that system occurs in a number of other Plains tribes.

The differences become still clearer when we turn from social to religious and ceremonial organizations. Among the Hidatsa there were military organizations graded by age, with entrance into any one of them dependent on purchase. Among the Crows the corresponding societies were all coordinate, and the element of purchase was wholly absent. The Hidatsa permanently delegated police power to a single age-society; the Crow societies took turns at

¹ The majority of the older Hidatsa understand and speak Crow because they have come in contact with Crow Indians; those Hidatsa that have not met with the Crows are able to understand only fragments of Crow conversation.

policing the camp. Of course, the societies, considered singly, have many details in common, but these are also shared by other tribes of the Plains area. The divergent evolution of the Crows and Hidatsa is noticeable even in two societies peculiar to them—the Lumpwood and the Stone Hämmer societies. Nothing is more characteristic of the Lumpwood society of the Crows than its rivalry with the Kit Fox society in war exploits and the annual attempts of its members to steal their rivals' wives. These features did not exist among the Hidatsa. On the other hand, the Hidatsa Stone Hammers had the privilege of entering any lodge at night and stealing what food they could get, while no such liberty was granted to their namesakes among the Crows.

None of the societies dealt with in the preceding paragraph can be regarded as having an essentially religious character, but both tribes had in addition a number of sacred organizations. Whether the series of Hidatsa women's societies—patterned in point of purchase and grading on the men's age-societies—should be classed under this heading, is doubtful. At all events, there is nothing at all parallel among the Crows. Medicine-bundle fraternities, with membership of each probably confined to certain definite families, are very conspicuous among the Hidatsa, but are also lacking among the Crows. The Medicine Pipe ceremony, as already noted, is shared by both tribes, but its occurrence among the Crows seems to be due to quite recent contact rather than to common possession before the time of separation. In either case, it is completely overshadowed, among the Crows, by the series of societies privileged to plant and harvest the sacred tobacco. Entrance into these societies, by far the most sacred and prominent in the tribe, is by a formal adoption involving heavy expense. Though individual Hidatsa secured Crow tobacco bags, it is probable that no Tobacco society existed among the Hidatsa, and certain that if such an organization did exist it played a very subordinate part in ceremonial life. Finally, there are considerable differences between the forms of the Sun dance. These would probably become still clearer if the Hidatsa ceremony were better known. With the Hidatsa the Sun dance was the performance of a medicine-bundle fraternity. Among the

Crows it was conducted by the individual owner of a doll bundle. The Hidatsa lodge was of the Arapaho-Blackfoot type, while that of the Crows was tipi-shaped. A Crow erected the lodge exclusively to secure a vision that should enable him to wreak vengeance on a tribe that had slain his brother, or some other close relative. This highly specialized point of view seems to have been absent from the mind of the Hidatsa pledger.

Of course, it would be strange if there were absolutely no cultural traces of the former relationship between Hidatsa and Crow. Even with our limited knowledge of Hidatsa customs it is possible to list some interesting points in common. Thus, the tribes coincide in the definition of the joking relationship, which obtains between *sons* of fellow-clansmen,¹ and in the modes of license permitted to the jokers. Dr Rivers has recently expressed the opinion that it is the social structure that constitutes the most stable element of culture. An examination of Crow and Hidatsa institutions leads to the query whether it is the large framework of social life, or not more frequently the minor social usage, such as the joking relationship, that is least likely to undergo change.

The quite recent history of several tribes I have visited seems to point in this direction. Among the Assiniboin it is no longer possible to get a clear insight into their former band (or clan?) system; but the parent-in-law taboo persists to the present day. In 1906 the Lemhi Shoshoni had lost most of their ancient life, but the custom of the menstrual hut was in full force. That social usages of the type mentioned may serve as sign-posts of a foreign cultural type is indicated by the absence of the mother-in-law taboo among the Arikara in spite of its presence among the Hidatsa and Mandan. As noted above, the influence of the Arikara on the neighboring tribes may have been considerable, and acculturation has certainly taken place in many directions; yet in this inconspicuous detail of everyday intercourse there is a sharp line of demarcation. Accordingly, it is obvious that the ethnologist must pay close attention to these minor social customs and must gather all related data. For example, in the case of so widespread a thing as the mother-in-law

¹ As stated before, descent is matrilineal.

taboo, it is necessary to inquire whether there are specific peculiarities—whether it is possible to disregard the rule after presenting the mother-in-law with a scalp, whether the words constituting her name are tabooed, whether the taboo disappears with the wife's death, and so forth. It is precisely such details that may help most in tracing historical connections. Whether, however, this holds generally or not, there can be no doubt that it holds for the two tribes compared. The Hidatsa and the Crows do not resemble each other in the conspicuous facts of either material, or social, or religious culture; they do resemble each other in certain minor traits that might be easily overlooked.

A third problem of some importance relates to the social organization of the Crows and Hidatsa. As already explained, these tribes have exogamous clans with maternal descent. The Mandan system, as given by Mr Curtis,¹ resembles that of the Hidatsa, but, as that author himself observes, it is possible that the information nowadays secured on this subject is unduly colored by Hidatsa influence. In practically all other Siouan tribes—certainly in all that could have influenced the Crow-Hidatsa sub-family in recent times—descent was traced through the father. Some Old World ethnologists might be tempted to suppose that the Crows and Hidatsa, like the Biloxi and Tutelo, have preserved a primeval condition of female descent, while all the other members of the Siouan stock have progressed to patrilineal descent. However, there is probably no American ethnologist that would seriously discuss such an hypothesis. It would be more to the purpose to cast about for some geographically contiguous tribe of alien stock from which the feature in question might have been derived. Here, however, we are doomed to disappointment. Of the Western Algonkin, the Arapaho had no clans or gentes; the Gros Ventres had gentes with paternal descent; while among the Blackfoot the preponderance of evidence is to the effect that their bands were non-exogamous as such, and that descent was reckoned in the father's line. The nature of the Cheyenne camp-circle division is a matter of dispute, but a direct influence from this tribe seems highly improbable.

¹ *The North American Indian*, vol. v, p. 145.

We are thus reduced to the Caddoan group: it might be supposed that the Arikara introduced the institution of maternal descent among their new neighbors of the upper Missouri. However, we find that neither the Skidi Pawnee nor the Arikara had anything like the Hidatsa system. The Arikara had no exogamous groups, and band membership was inherited in the male line;¹ and the Skidi had an endogamous village grouping with male descent.² We may conclude that the system of exogamous groups with matrilineal descent is a Crow-Hidatsa peculiarity. At the same time we must remember that the resemblance between the social organization of these two tribes is limited to this one rather general feature. Indeed, the common possession of this single feature gains significance only through its absence in other tribes.

An unsolved problem in the sociology of the Crows and Hidatsa is the function of the larger social units in which the clans are grouped. As stated above, I could get no evidence to show that the Four-Clan and Three-Clan divisions of the Hidatsa were exogamous. Among the Crows the testimony of different informants proved contradictory, some asserting that marriage was quite proper within one of the larger divisions provided there was no violation of the clan-exogamy rule, while others stated that the clan-groups were as exogamous as the single clans. It seems doubtful whether the question can be satisfactorily settled for the Hidatsa at this late day, but among the Crows an objective study of all the marriages that have taken place between middle-aged people now living, together with those of their parents, may shed light on the exogamous or non-exogamous character of these groups. The fact that the larger groups have no names is significant, but cannot be considered as more than presumptive evidence against the hypothesis of exogamy.

Finally, a few words may be devoted to the problem of the age and military societies. The questions connected with this subject are partly of a psychological and partly of an historical

¹ Curtis, loc. cit., pp. 61, 149.

² G. A. Dorsey, Social Organization of the Skidi Pawnee, *Congrès International des Américanistes*, xv^e session, II, p. 70.

character. Psychologically, the principal point of interest is whether the ostensible gradation by age that has been found among the Mandan and Hidatsa is really at bottom a classification by age. For reasons stated at length several years ago¹ I regarded this as improbable even before visiting the tribes. Recent investigation in the field shows that the age grading is a by-product of the mode of purchase. The subjective attitude of the natives is that a man holds membership in every society that he has ever bought and has never sold. Thus a man of ninety may still belong to—or rather own membership in—a society purchased at twenty. In other words, the fundamental correlation is not between age and membership in a certain organization, but between purchase and membership. The age element enters through the custom that all age-mates purchased a society at the same time, which custom naturally leads to a more and more refined classification by age as the number of purchasable societies increases.

Another question is, whether the age societies of the tribes mentioned, as well as the ungraded societies of their neighbors, should be considered as religious organizations. For the Crows, this question must be unhesitatingly answered in the negative. The military organizations of the Crows were, apart from their military character, essentially social associations similar to four organizations of the present day, which join in the performance of the Grass dance on certain occasions and otherwise have the functions of clubs and mutual benefit brotherhoods. The Hidatsa and Mandan age societies had a number of religious traits; several of the regalia seem to have been invested with a sacred character, and there is a considerable proportion of origin myths based on supernatural revelation. Nevertheless—and this also applies to the corresponding ungraded societies of the Arikara—there is a very clear distinction between the attitude of these Indians toward all of the aforementioned organizations and their attitude toward the really esoteric medicine-bundle organizations. The most conservative natives willingly discuss the military societies, while only the christianized

¹ The Assiniboine, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, IV, pp. 75-98.

Indians consent to speak of the more sacred organizations of the second class. Essentially, then, none of the military societies can be viewed as a full-fledged religious association.

The age grading of the Hidatsa and Mandan women's societies rests on the same principle as that of the men. Two of them, the Goose Women and the Buffalo Women societies, are of a rather more religious character than any in the men's series, and had for their function the insurance of a sufficient supply of corn and buffalo respectively. Schurtz's conjecture that the Arikara also had women's societies is confirmed by an informant, the organizations bearing the names of the Goose and the River Snake.

The historical questions that develop from a study of this subject are numerous, and cannot be readily solved except in principle. As I have shown in the paper referred to above, the question how and where the *system* of grading and purchase originated must be considered apart from the development and spread of ceremonial activity or regalia, and must also be treated as distinct from the question of the tribal functions of societies. For a satisfactory investigation of these historical questions it is necessary to consider the societies of all the Plains tribes. Then we discover that any one society is best characterized as a complex of features that are not necessarily connected in that particular way. Certain functions, such as police activity, and certain emblems, such as a stick wrapped with otter skin, are very widely diffused over the area, but they may appear in rather different combinations. Thus, the police functions may either devolve, not on any society, but on gentes, as among the Osage; or they may be associated in turn with all of the military societies, as among the Crows; or they may be vested in one particular society, as among the Mandan and Hidatsa. Similarly, a stick wrapped with otter skin occurs in the Mandan Soldier society, the Crow Kit-Fox organization, and various societies of other tribes. When, therefore, we find among the Mandan a society that has two otter-skin sticks and at the same time exercises police authority, we shall not regard this as proof that there is a necessary connection between these two features, but merely as a secondary association. Of course we must guard against the error

of supposing that all traits that are logically distinct must also have been historically distinct at one time. For example, no logical reason can be given why the bearing of an otter-skin stick should be connected with the duty of not retreating from the enemy; but since these two *logical* elements are, as a matter of fact, always joined, we may reasonably assume that their union is historically primary.

The course of development, however, has certainly been in large measure the result of secondary association. The fundamental fact is the tendency throughout the area toward forming societies of some sort, and the development of the several tribal systems of coordinating or subordinating the societies within any one tribe. Secondly, we have the very extensive occurrence of borrowing and its effect on the character of the established systems and their constituent societies. When a definite system has been established, there is a tendency to fit every society into it, even regardless of its function and ceremonial character. Thus, among the Arapaho the fifth and sixth societies bear no resemblance to the lower organizations of the same series. Similarly, the lower members of the women's series among the Hidatsa and Mandan seem to bear no relation to the Goose and Buffalo societies except for the mode of purchase and the fact that each has its relative grading. That such societies are linked together may be regarded as a case of secondary association even if we suppose that the single societies all originated among the same people. The clearest illustrations of this process, however, occur where we have demonstration of borrowing. Thus, a comparison of the systems of the Arapaho and the closely related Gros Ventres reveals far-reaching similarities, but there are several differences, among them the presence in the Gros Ventre series of a Fly dance, which is absent from the Arapaho series. This Fly dance does occur, however, among the Blackfeet, where Prince Maximilian discovered it in 1833. Since the Gros Ventres are known to have been in close contact with this tribe and since the dance has not been recorded anywhere else,¹ the Gros Ventres must

¹ Dr Goddard tells me that the Sarcee had the dance, but its introduction is also due to the Blackfeet.

be supposed to have adopted it from the Blackfeet, especially as the Fly dancers occupy exactly the same position in the two series. It is obvious however, that the introduction of a new society in this way alters the grading, and may even cause more serious displacements, of the other members of the series. In the instance just cited both the borrowing and the receiving tribe had a graded series. In other instances societies must have been borrowed by tribes with a graded series from tribes without the graded system, or *vice versa*. Thus, the Dog society occurs in the graded series of the Arapaho, Gros Ventres, Blackfeet, Hidatsa, and Mandan, and also among the ungraded societies of the Cheyenne and Crows. In such cases we must be careful to determine precisely what has been borrowed. For example, the Crows state that their Dog society was derived from the Hidatsa. Now, the Dogs formed one of the highest societies in the Hidatsa series, but as the Crows did not grade their organizations, this feature could not persist among them. Further, the officers of the Hidatsa Dogs might approach the meat-rack of the Goose Women and appropriate the best slices for themselves. This highly characteristic privilege likewise could not be introduced among the Crows, as there were no women's organizations among them. More important than this feature is the mode of entrance. As the Hidatsa method was foreign to the Crows, the Dog society among them was simply entered in the same way as their other military societies, without formal purchase or adoption. On the other hand, the Hidatsa Dogs had nothing to do with police duties, for these were vested in their Blackmouth society. But among the Crows the military societies took turns at policing the tribe, and accordingly the Dogs sometimes acted in this capacity. Summing up, we may say that in the Crow tribe the Dog organization is indeed translated: the borrowed ceremonial elements, still summed up under the old name, have received a specifically Crow stamp.

The illustration just given shows the secondary association of a borrowed ceremonial complex when adapted to a pre-existing tribal system. Single ceremonial elements, such as dewclaw rattles, may of course be adopted without requiring any special adaptation. Nevertheless, an analogous process may occur even in their case.

When an emblem has become the possession of one society in a tribe, it may be adopted by other societies. Thus, among the Crows two societies not merely different but antagonistic have identically the same straight and hooked sticks wrapped with otter skins, and other societies share the same type of officer's sash. Indeed, the origin of such a thing as a definite scheme, whether of purchase or anything else, becomes intelligible as the result of similar patterning on a single model that may have been in the first place produced by some historical accident. To return to the single ceremonial elements, it appears that they are often very mobile and may become associated with all sorts of complexes. This applies, for example, to the custom of expressing the opposite of one's meaning, which is sometimes coupled with obligatory foolhardiness, in other cases with a fire-dance and various ceremonial performances.

A student of the societies of this area must accordingly seek to determine both the specific tribal peculiarities with regard to the organization of societies and the precise extent to which borrowing has taken place. It is obvious that the sum total of features characterizing any one society will often embrace some that are not reducible to this formula because new features may be added from time to time without being borrowed, and representing individual additions rather than tribal peculiarities. However, the merging of alien elements into the native complexes covers a very large area of the field, and continued investigation from this point of view will doubtless prove fruitful.

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